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Ottawa-born Spiritan appointed **Bishop** of San Pedro, Paraguay

Deborah Gyapong

Pope Francis appointed an Ottawa-born priest as Bishop of San Pedro, in Paraguay, a long way from the Hull sector of Gatineau, Quebec, where he grew up.

Spiritan Bishop Pierre Jubinville is going back to an area he knows well. He spent eight years in the San Pedro diocese as a Spiritan missionary.

"I knew I wanted to become a religious and a priest," he said. While a student at Collège Saint-Alexandre in Hull, Quebec — a private school run by the Spiritans — he decided to join the order.

Being a Spiritan

"For me community life is very important. It's not just to live together, it's a way of discerning, a way of approaching everything," he said. "Being religious and being missionary are essential parts of being a Spiritan."

But the image he had of missions as a teenager came from posters of starving or malnourished children "with the flies around."

"I was not a very adventurous person," he admitted. But his first experience of missions — two months in Mexico — made him realize the posters did not tell the whole story.

"I think it is a remarkable act of confidence that [the Paraguayan people] would call me to serve them and be there in a certain way to represent them."

"Around the child there's a people: parents, a family, a whole life different from this isolated picture," he said.

He experienced the same thing when he went to Zaire, now known as Democratic Republic of Congo. "Mission is to reach out to people," he said.

At first he thought of being a religious and a missionary, but in Zaire he also realized "what it would be like to be a pastor of a people," he said.



Ordained a priest

A year later, in 1988, then Gatineau-Hull Bishop Roger Ebacher ordained him.

Ebacher, now Gatineau Archbishop-Emeritus, described Jubinville as "very bright" and "a poet."

"He seemed to me to be a very good priest when I ordained him," said Ebacher. "I didn't think he would be a bishop, but I am very happy about that!"

Jubinville went on to obtain a Licenciature in religious studies from the Institut Catholique de Paris. He served in Mexico, then in Paraguay as a parish priest in Lima,

San Pedro, and as superior of the Spiritan community in Asuncion. Since 2012 he has been in Rome as First General Assistant in the Congregation of the Holy Spirit.

Ebacher recalls visiting Paraguay when Jubinville was a pastor in Lima. "I had a marvelous time with him, visiting the country, visiting the poor."

The Spiritan priest was concerned about those who suffered under the dictatorship and introduced the bishop

to friends who had been tortured by the regime. “He was a good pastor, able to meet people, to share with them their preoccupations,” Ebacher said.

In addition to his parish he had several other communities “here and there in the bush,” Ebacher said. “I was very touched by his way of doing pastoral work, of being near people.”

Rural pastoral life

Jubenville said that during his eight years in the San Pedro diocese he at first reached out to indigenous communities scattered through the diocese “visiting them and trying to establish bonds between them and the church.” He was also

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involved in rural pastoral life and parishes, some large, some just small chapels, co-ordinating, visiting and animating their formation. He also served in the city.

“I think things have changed a lot,” he said of the diocese he will return to as bishop. “There’s a big problem with land, with poverty. The church too has grown; the population is more urban now.”

He expects to spend at least a year visiting and becoming reacquainted with the diocese to get a feel for things. San Pedro is 22,000 square kilometers in size. Out of its population of 453,000, there are 416,000 Catholics, served by 28 priests and 47 religious.

Crossing boundaries, reaching out

The Spiritan charism involves going to places in the world where it has been difficult to find workers: “Pope Francis is helping us very much to come back to that. If it wasn’t for him I wouldn’t have accepted this change in my life,” Jubenville said. “He is showing the way to cross boundaries and to reach out to people. That has helped me to cross the boundary from religious life to diocesan life; from a congregation to an episcopal conference.”

It’s a big challenge to serve as a bishop in another country, he said. Though he loves the Paraguayan people, he is not Paraguayan. “I think it is a remarkable act of confidence that they would call me to serve them and be there in a certain way to represent them.”

Communities of faith and mission

“I will remain a foreigner and that implies many difficulties in totally understanding, totally being part of their adventure,”

he said. “That for me is a very great sign of the universality of the church and the openness that has to reign among us. We need to build communities of faith and mission,” he said, “The Latin American bishops have realized that if the church does not become missionary it’s going to die.”

The church is not just some specialized union, he said. “We all have to become very passionate about other people, find ways to love other people, to know them and to build bridges,” he said.

“The whole adventure of going out of ourselves, of reaching out to brothers and sisters, changes us. It makes our church life much more concrete and alive,” he said.

Jubenville’s father and sister still live in Gatineau. The Spiritan community there, however, has grown too small to keep running Collège Saint-Alexandre, which is now lay-run. Few vocations to the Congregation come from Canada now; most come from Africa.

“What I know about youth today is that the church is not very much part of their universe,” Jubenville said. “I was of another generation, even if a very small minority in my time. I am always happy to talk about the adventure faith has put me on. It can be a very fulfilling experience for anyone who wants to give his or her life to it.” ■

Pierre Jubenville was ordained bishop on December 21, 2013 in San Pedro. Reprinted with permission from *Canadian Catholic News*.

Spiritans worldwide

Total membership 2828
Countries 57

Top Ten Countries

Nigeria	683
France	353
Ireland	306
Portugal	139
Ghana	133
Tanzania	122
Netherlands	84
Angola	80
Cameroon	77
Poland	77
USA	59
Canada	32